

Message Text

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PAGE 01 FRANKF 02815 290906Z

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SUBJECT: PROSPECTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF SAARLAND ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY: ELECTIONS FOR SAARLAND PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE
MAY 4 EXPECTED TO PRODUCE PHOTO FINISH. PROSPECT THAT
CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS MIGHT LOSE CONTROL OF SAARLAND
GOVERNMENT -- AND WITH IT THE CDU/CSU MAJORITY IN
THE UPPER CHAMBER OF THE FEDERAL LEGISLATURE -- HAS
ATTRACTED INCREASED INTEREST IN THE SAAR ELECTIONS.
END SUMMARY.

2. ALTHOUGH THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (CDU) POLLED ONLY
47.8 PERCENT IN THE 1970 SAARLAND ELECTIONS FOR THE PROVINCIAL
LEGISLATURE (LANDTAG), THE FAILURE OF THE FREE
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PAGE 02 FRANKF 02815 290906Z

DEMOCRATS -- TORN BY THEIR PARTY'S DECISION TO FORM A

COALITION WITH THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (SPD) ON THE FEDERAL LEVEL IN 1969 -- TO CLEAR THE 5 PERCENT HURDLE AND RETAIN ANY SEATS ENABLED THE CDU TO WIN AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY OF 27 SEATS IN THE 50-MEMBER PARLIAMENT. THE SPD AND FDP RESPONDED BY CHOOSING NEW, YOUNG LEADERS WHO REVITALIZED THEIR PARTY ORGANIZATIONS AND FOLLOWERS. IN THE 1972 BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS THE SPD EMERGED AS THE LARGEST SINGLE PARTY FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND IN THOSE ELECTIONS AND THE 1974 COMMUNAL ELECTIONS THE FDP STABILIZED ITS REBUILT ELECTORATE AT A LITTLE MORE THAN 7 PERCENT. THE SAAR FDP IS FORMALLY COMMITTED TO COALITION WITH THE SPD.

3. FOLLOWING ITS 1972 SETBACK THE CDU, STIRRED BY FEAR OF LOSING ITS TRADITIONAL PREDOMINANCE IN SAARLAND, CHOSE A NEW CHAIRMAN AND HEIR-APPARENT TO MINISTER-PRESIDENT ROEDER (16 YEARS IN OFFICE, LONGER THAN ANY OTHER FRG PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT CHIEF) AND BROUGHT FRESH FACES INTO HALF OF THE CABINET POSTS. CDU MORALE WAS RESTORED BY WINNING 50.4 PERCENT IN THE 1974 COMMUNAL ELECTIONS. THE PRO-CDU TREND IN PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS OF THE PAST SIX MONTHS SUGGESTED LITTLE PROSPECT FOR CHANGE IN THE SAARLAND GOVERNMENT. POLLS TAKEN IN FEBRUARY INDICATED THE CDU WOULD RETAIN ITS ABSOLUTE MAJORITY EVEN IF THE FDP CAME BACK INTO THE LANDTAG, WHICH WOULD BE BY THE TINIEST OF MARGINS IF AT ALL. IN VIEW OF THIS EXPECTATION AND THE FACT THAT NO NATIONAL REPUTATIONS WERE AT STAKE, THE SAARLAND CAMPAIGN AND ELECTIONS WERE OF PURELY LOCAL INTEREST. ATTENTION CENTERED ON LANDTAG ELECTIONS IN NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA TO BE HELD ON THE SAME DAY.

4. THE UNEXPECTED RESULTS OF THE SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN LANDTAG ELECTIONS ON APRIL 13 CHANGED ALL THAT. THE HOPES OF THE CDU TO ACHIEVE AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN NRW, THEREBY INCREASING THE PARTY'S BUNDESRAT MAJORITY, APPEARED DASHED. INSTEAD, THE CDU WAS SEEN TO BE FIGHTING FOR ITS LIFE AND ITS BUNDESRAT MAJORITY IN THE SAARLAND. THE SPD AND FDP GENERATED CONSIDERABLE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 FRANKF 02815 290906Z

PUBLICITY BY CONDUCTING CONFERENCES OF THEIR FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL LEADERS IN THE SAARLAND. THE FDP WENT ONE STEP FARTHER, HOSTING A MEETING OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL IN THE SAAR CAPITAL QUOTE AT THE HEART OF EUROPE. UNQUOTE. THE CDU CONVENED A MEETING OF ITS NATIONAL PRESIDUM IN THE SAARLAND AND SCORED A SUBSTANTIVE HIT BY ANNOUNCING A FORMAL DECISION IN FAVOR OF MAINTAINING THE INTEGRITY OF THE

SAARLAND AGAINST SCHEMES TO REORGANIZE PROVINCIAL BOUNDARIES, AN ISSUE ON WHICH THE OTHER TWO PARTIES EQUIVOCATED OR BEEN QUOTE SOFT UNQUOTE. NATIONAL LEADERS OF ALL THREE PARTIES HAVE BEEN CAMPAIGNING ALMOST DAILY IN THE SAARLAND FOR THE PAST WEEK. THE SPD AND FDP BROUGHT DOWN MATTHIESEN AND RONNEBURGER, QUOTE THE VICTORS OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN UNQUOTE. STRAUSS HAD MADE ONLY TWO MINOR APPEARANCES UNTIL THE CDU QUOTE GRAND FINALE UNQUOTE IN SAARBRUECKEN ON SUNDAY, APRIL 27, WHICH DREW THE LARGEST AND MOST ENTHUSIASTIC CROWD OF THE CAMPAIGN.

5. PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL LEADERS OF THE THREE PARTIES EARNS MOST ATTENTION, BUT LOCAL LEADERS HAVE BEEN CONDUCTING A MAXIMUM EFFORT. SPD CHAIRMAN FRIEDEL LAEPPLER, DESIGNATED CANDIDATE FOR MINISTER-PRESIDENT, GETS FULL MARKS FOR TRYING HARDEST, BUT HIS EFFORTS ARE NOT ALWAYS EFFECTIVE AND HIS LEADERSHIP IS NOT UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED IN HIS OWN PARTY. HOWEVER, WE DISCOUNT RUMORS THAT THE SPD WOULD NAME SAARBURECKEN MAYOR OSKAR LAFONTAINE AS MINISTER-PRESIDENT, INSTEAD OF LAEPPLER, IF IT WINS THE CHANCE. FDP CHAIRMAN WERNER KLUMPP HAS EXPOSED HIMSELF TO CHARGES OF SELLING HIS PARTY'S COALITION PLEDGE TO THE SPD IN RETURN FOR THE SPD VOTES HE NEEDED TO BECOME PRESIDENT OF THE SAARBRUECKEN COUNTY COUNCIL. TO DEMONSTRATE FDP INDEPENDENCE HE HAS CRITICIZED LAEPPLER'S PROPOSALS FOR HOSPITAL-MEDICAL REFORM (LAEPPLER IS CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL SPD'S HEALTH COMMISSION) AS QUOTE TOO SOCIALISTIC UNQUOTE.

6. HOWEVER, MIN-PRES ROEDER IS UNDOUBTEDLY STILL THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 FRANKF 02815 290906Z

MOST POPULAR POLITICAL FIGURE IN THE SAARLAND, AND THE CDU ATTEMPTS TO PLAY DOWN THE EXPECTATION THAT THE 65-YEAR-OLD WOULD RETIRE WITHIN A COUPLE OF YEARS. ALTHOUGH NOT ALL OF THE NEW CDU MINISTERS HAVE PROVEN THEIR ADMINISTRATIVE OR VOTE-CATCHING ABILITIES, THE CDU TEAM IN GENERAL PROJECTS AN IMAGE OF VIGOR AND TALENT IN DEPTH. THE OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE TRYING TO STICK A LABEL OF MISMANAGEMENT (IF NOT MALFEASANCE) ON THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE BANKRUPTCY OF THE SAAR-BAU-UNION, A GOVT-FINANCED CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, BUT THEY SEEM TO HAVE HAD LESS IMPACT THAN THE HESSEN CDU DID LAST OCTOBER WITH THE QUOTE HELABA AFFAIR UNQUOTE. OPINION POLLS INDICATE THAT THE THINKING PUBLIC NOW ANTICIPATES AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE ECONOMY, BUT THE WELL-ABOVE-AVERAGE UNEMPLOYMENT

OF 6.1 PERCENT IN SAARLAND SHOULD ENABLE THE CDU TO EXPLOIT THAT ISSUE. NEVERTHELESS, THE CDU IS QUOTE RUNNING SCARED UNQUOTE.

7. IN 1970 THE NPD POLLED 3.4 PERCENT AND THE DKP 2.7 PERCENT. IN MORE RECENT ELECTIONS THEIR COMBINED TOTAL HAS BEEN ABOUT 2.5-3 PERCENT, FREEING A SIMILAR PERCENTAGE WHICH -- IN THE PRESENT POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES -- WOULD MOST REASONABLY SPLIT 2-1 FOR THE CDU. THIS SUGGESTS THAT, WHILE THE CDU SHOULD STILL EMERGE AS THE LARGEST SINGLE PARTY, IT MIGHT WELL FALL SHORT OF THE 50 PERCENT MARK. LAEPPE MODESTLY PREDICTS THE SPD WILL ATTAIN 42 PERCENT, AND HE SEES QUOTE A REASONABLE CHANCE UNQUOTE THAT THE SPD AND FDP TOGETHER WILL WIN AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY OF LANDTAG SEATS. BEFORE SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN THE LEADERS OF THE FDP IN HESSEN AND RHEINLAND-PFALZ WERE PRIVATELY PESSIMISTIC THAT THEIR SAARLAND BRETHERN WOULD CLEAR THE 5 PERCENT HURDLE, BUT THE GENERAL EXPECTATION NOW IS THAT THE PARTY MAY ATTAIN AS MUCH AS 7 PERCENT. THUS, IT APPEARS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT THE TWO OPPOSING CAMPS COULD COME OUT OF THE ELECTION WITH ROUGHLY EQUAL NUMBERS OF VOTES, THE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY BEING DECIDED BY THE ACCIDENT OF DISTRIBUTION AMONG THE THREE ELECTION DISTRICTS AND THE CONSEQUENT ARITHMETIC OF SEAT ALLOCATION. THE 1974-5 SERIES OF LANDTAG ELECTIONS SAW SEVERAL BIG OR SMALL SURPRISES, BUT THE SAARLAND -- NEWEST AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 05 FRANKF 02815 290906Z

LITTLEST OF THEM ALL -- MIGHT PRODUCE THE ONLY REAL CHANGE. HARLAN

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